

Christos P. Ioannides, *Cyprus Under British Colonial Rule—Culture, Politics, and the Movement toward Union with Greece, 1878-1954* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2019), 321 pages.

Reviewed by Constantine P. Danopoulos.

Although culture (i.e., the prevailing attitudes, norms, beliefs, underlying assumptions, values, and symbols that permeate a society) has always been considered important, nevertheless, in recent decades, social scientists seem to have downgraded its worth, viewing it as lacking a sufficient scientific basis. In doing so, they have deprived themselves of a key explanatory variable. Christos P. Ioannides' book makes a significant effort to close that gap, particularly as it relates to the study of foreign policy and international relations. It succeeds beyond expectations.

The author explores and analyzes "the role of culture and its religious dimensions in politics" with regard to the Greek-Cypriot anti-colonial upheaval and movement for union with Greece or *Enosis* (1878-1954), which was marked by two major rebellions: 1931 and 1955. Ioannides argues the *Enosis* struggle was a classic popular movement emanating from and fueled by the long and intimate fusion of the Greek Orthodox religion and irredentist nationalism that swept Greece from the mid 19th century onward. Known as the *Megali Idea*, this policy aimed to redeem the unity of the Hellenic world, including the Greek Cypriots, for "they spoke the same language, practiced the same religion, and were identified with the same culture and traditions."

In addition to his native Cyprus, the author conducted extensive research elsewhere, including Middle Eastern countries, and asserts that the fusion of religion and politics helps us understand independence movements, uprisings, and resistance upheavals in other parts of the world. Among others, these include the Islamic revolution in Iran of the late 1970s, India's anti-colonial struggle, America's quagmire in Vietnam, Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation of their homeland, the break-up of Yugoslavia, and the sectarian violence that ensued the Washington-instigated demise of Iraq's Saddam Hussein. In Ioannides' view, the frequent failure of entangled powers—like the United States, Britain, and Russia—to appreciate the importance of religion and the

formidable potency of the intersection of culture and politics leads to disastrous foreign policy outcomes.

Armed with Greek and American education skills and methodological tools, thorough understanding of Cypriot and Greek history, and knowledge of the Greek language and the Cypriot vernacular/idiom, Ioannides isolates, identifies, and documents the nature, texture, and sources of the religion-culture nexus and its impact on the Greek Cypriot drive for self-determination and union with Greece. The author asserts that the influence of the autocephalous Orthodox Church has deep and durable roots that pervade every aspect of Greek Cypriot life and culture. The long Ottoman occupation left an indelible legacy on the island, as it did elsewhere. The empire's religious-based organizational structure (millet system) allowed relative autonomy to the various religious entities and assigned the clergy the leading role in the affairs of each community. The unintended consequence of this was to elevate the religious head as the *de facto* political/ethnic leader (ethnarch). It is no accident, then, that the Greek Cypriot clergy played a pivotal role in the *Enosis* struggle and the head of the church, the archbishop, was universally recognized as the vicar of the movement. In addition, much like during the Iranian revolution when mullahs used the mosque, both as a sanctuary and a bully pulpit, to disseminate Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary messages, the Greek Cypriot clergy used the church altar to impart and reinforce the unbreakable link and seminal role of Orthodoxy in the lives of people and to spread pro-*Enosis* sentiments. This was especially true in the villages and towns throughout the countryside where the nearly 4/5ths of the island population lived engaged in agriculture. The commemoration and celebration of the patron saint (*panigyri*) was more than a simple festival, but forums where religious fervor was intermixed with patriotic symbols, songs and poems, plays staged by amateur actors, and other types of folkloric activities that propagated, reinforced, and kept alive nationalistic feelings. Ioannides avers that Greek Orthodox culture served as "the main vehicle of resistance against British colonial rule," and leaves no doubt that rural Cyprus was the fountainhead and the backbone of the *Enosis* movement. It set the parameters of the struggle and provided it with uninterrupted support.

Though an uphill battle from its inception, the *Enosis* struggle became even more difficult with the advent of the tense international environment of the cold war and the bipolar world that emerged at the end of World War II. Without a doubt, the movement needed the strong and dedicated support of the mother country. Devastated by the war and the civil fratricide that followed (1946-49), official Greece was reluctant to assume such a role. Indicative of this attitude was the response of vice premier George Papandreou to the Cypriot representative whether the Greek government recognized the legitimacy of the *Enosis* movement. Speaking for almost the entire Greek political class, minus the exiled left, the unusually eloquent Papandreou stressed: "Greece, today, is

breathing with two lungs, one British and the other American. The country cannot die of asphyxiation because of Cyprus." Though painful, the official Greek line "had to strike a balance between the overwhelming dependence on the United States and Britain and the profound popular sentiment in support of *Enosis*."

But the formidable and durable strength of culture was once again at work. Using the strong ties with fellow Orthodox Church brethren in the mother country, pro-*Enosis* elements, led by the clergy, appealed directly to the Greek people using the alter as a ready-made bully pulpit. The campaign to arise the Greek public and to put pressure on the Greek government to change its position became more intense with the election of Makarios III (1913-1977) in 1950 to head the Orthodox Church of Cyprus. Endowed with considerable rhetorical skills and enjoying the overwhelming loyalty and relentless support of his people, regardless of their political orientation, the charismatic prelate defined the Cypriot struggle, appealed directly to the Greek people, and managed to elevate pro-*Enosis* sentiments among the Greeks to unprecedented heights. Even the island's powerful non-doctrinaire communists (AKEL) identified with the movement's emphasis on social justice and altruism and rendered its valuable support. In time, the effort bore fruit eventually forcing the conservative Greek government of Marshall Alexandros Papagos to relent and undertake a vigorous, if somewhat guarded, diplomatic campaign in favor of the struggle. As Ioannides rather epigrammatically retorts, "the support of the vast majority of the Greek people overshadowed the Greek government."

The British response to the outbreak of the Greek Cypriots demands for self-determination displayed many of the same elements London employed in other challenges to colonial rule, chief of which was the use of divide and rule tactics. As in India in the 1940s, London sought to energize the Muslim/Turkish minority in Cyprus, urging them to oppose self-determination as *Enosis* with Greece would push them into the sidelines rendering them to a voiceless and even suppressed minority. Having little contact with the population living outside the major urban centers, and lulled by the colonial mentality, the British government had little understanding and appreciation of the power of Hinduism and the appeal of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance. In a similar vein, London saw the Greek Cypriot agitation as an urban phenomenon with virtually no support in the countryside. This self-deceiving mentality "resulted in the misreading of the people's *zeitgeist*." Simply put, the British colonial masters failed to realize the potency, dedication and the wherewithal of the Church to provide "the mechanism for the creation of a national network [that] advanced the cause of *Enosis* by politicizing religion." Confronted with an incomprehensible situation, "the British had no antidote," as Washington had no means to counter the rising tides of Shi'ite fueled nationalism in Iran some decades later any more than Moscow did to stop the Afghan mujahidin's successful resistance to the vastly superior Soviet military machine.

Cyprus Under Colonial Rule is a noteworthy piece of scholarship. Only a person with Ioannides' unique methodological and fine literary skills could bring it to fruition. The author has produced a thorough, comprehensive, and eminently readable tome that gives the reader a methodologically sound, empirically well-grounded, and theoretically sophisticated understanding of the role of the Greek Orthodox Church in the emergence and maintenance of a culture that provided the bones and the flesh behind the *Enosis* movement among Greek Cypriots. On a theoretical level, Ioannides' work is a resounding response to the doubters of the power of culture as a worthy and assessable variable in the study of politics and international relations. Lastly, governments would do well to take a page from this work, for it can provide valuable lessons and insights to leaders embarking on foreign policy choices without a clear understanding and appreciation of the social and cultural milieu of the countries concerned.

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